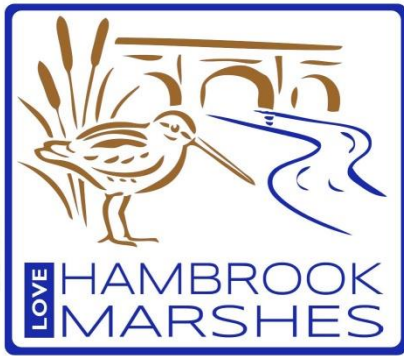




Newsletter

May 2025



Early summer dawn, with Bell Harry tower poking above the old railway embankment

Welcome

Raw sewage was discharged into England's rivers and coastal waters for 3.6 million hours last year, a slight increase on 2023. Data released by the Environment Agency at the end of March appear to show that, despite their protestations and investment in water purification, water companies have in fact done nothing to improve the safety of our waters, or the health of those who drink or bathe in them. Worst culprits were Anglian Water, with its 63% increase in sewage discharges between 2023 and 2024, followed by Thames Water, whose raw sewage discharges rose by 50% during the same period. Sites with special conservation protection, such as Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and Ramsar, were not immune. The smallest glimmer of hope was provided by the region we are in – Southern Water – where the number of hours of raw sewage discharge actually fell by a rather measly 4%. The government has secured over £100 billion of private sector investment to upgrade our woefully inadequate infra-structure, but it remains to be seen if that will be sufficient.

What's happening on the Marshes?

There is less management going on during the summer months, but minor gate repairs were carried out, edges of the riverside path were mown, and the willow maze received its first cut of the season. Odd behaviour was seen when a few of the cattle took to gnawing at one of the fence struts (below), considerably weakening it in the process. Hopefully, this was an isolated occurrence, and the cows don't start attacking all the posts.



Wildlife Report



A local resident tells me that she has been hearing the cuckoo regularly on the Marshes, and often close at hand, but I have been less fortunate, as all my records have been of distant birds that strain the hearing. Three pairs of tufted duck turned up on the river on 4th; I always think of them as winter visitors to the nearby Tonford Lake, but some 500 or so pairs do nest in Kent, including along the Stour, and numbers have increased markedly over the past forty years, so possibly these birds were going to breed locally. A kingfisher was my first for several weeks, and a sparrowhawk on 19th had last been recorded over a year ago. A little egret (left) was my first since February, and two great crested grebes were once again evident on Tonford Lake.

The first reed warbler was heard on 14th. Like most warblers, it is a summer visitor which, like too many other species, is found less frequently at Hambrook than ten years ago. This may be due, at least in part, to changes in the management of the osier bed, as this small area of willows is now cut annually, thus drastically reducing the area of potentially suitable habitat for the birds.

Foxes are common enough, both in town and country, but quite a rarity on the Marshes, so it came as rather a surprise to see one just ten feet away on 19th and then again on 23rd. Remarkably, rabbits, which are a staple part of the diet of many foxes, have never been seen by me on the Marshes.



Thanks to Dave Smith for the little egret photo, and to Simon Pettman for the fox photo

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